

# The Philosophical Roots of Psychology

(by Thomas Wren)

Lecture 1  
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## Plato

# Agenda

- Plato's Historical Context
- His Big Question
  1. His Conception of Human Development
  2. His Model of the Mind
  3. His Method of Inquiry
  4. His Conception of the Individual & Society
- His Relevance to Contemporary Psychology

## Historical Context

- The “Golden Age” of Greece (500-300 BCE)
- Socrates > Plato > Aristotle > Alexander (!)
- Plato (428-347 BCE)

### PLATO

Born in Athens 428 BC

Wealthy aristocratic family, served in army,  
traveled to Sicily and elsewhere, died at 81 yrs.

Studied under Socrates, founded the Academy

Wrote 24 “Dialogues”

Early dialogues: Socrates’ ideas

Middle dialogues (incl. *The Republic*):

combines Socrates’ & Plato’s ideas

Late dialogues: Plato’s ideas

# Plato's Big Question

- “How can different things be the same?”\*

## \*Related Questions:

- The One and the Many
- The Visible and the Invisible
- The Real and the Unreal
- The Good and Goods

## TWO EXAMPLES

1. The opening (or is it **openings**?) of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony

The orchestral performance (performances?)

Keyboard noises

The score

Beethoven's internal auditory image(s?)

2. A beautiful sunset, a beautiful soccer goal, a beautiful symphony, a beautiful vase, a beautiful dog, a beautiful child, etc.

# Our Four Psychological Themes

	<u>Human Development</u>	<u>Model of the Mind</u>	<u>Method of Inquiry</u>	<u>Self &amp; Society</u>
<u>Plato</u>	Knowing the Good (escaping from the cave)	Four levels of knowledge and four levels of reality	Conceptual analysis and reminiscence	Three parts of soul and three classes of society
<u>Aristotle</u>				
<u>Descartes, Locke, etc.</u>				

# 1. Plato's Conception of Human Development

- Self Development
- Intellectual Development
- Moral Development

## 1. Plato's Conception of Human Development

### **Self Development**

No distinct concept of Selfhood

Delphic oracle produced humility in Socrates

### **Intellectual Development**

Increasingly real knowledge & increasingly real objects  
of knowledge

“Real” = “Ideal” (because reality is permanent,  
a la Parmenides)

### **Moral Development**

Virtue is produced by knowledge of the Good

Knowledge of the Good is produced by virtuous living

“To know the Good is to choose it.”

# The Life Cycle

- Pre-existence of soul
- Development as the recovery of innate ideas
- Death as fulfillment and return

## THE LIFE CYCLE

Pre-existence of soul

A metaphysical claim?

A figure of speech?

Development as the recovery of Innate ideas

Anamnesis

Emergence from cave

Death as fulfillment

Christian analogues

## 2. Plato's Model of the Mind

- Isomorphic correspondence of mental and ontological structures
- Progress from lowest to highest level is “stage structural” (Analogy of the Divided Line)
- Relationships between levels are defined in terms of resemblance, not causality, but...

## 2. Plato's Model of the Mind

Isomorphic correspondence of mental and ontological structures:

Four levels of knowledge for four levels of reality

Each level of knowledge has its own structure

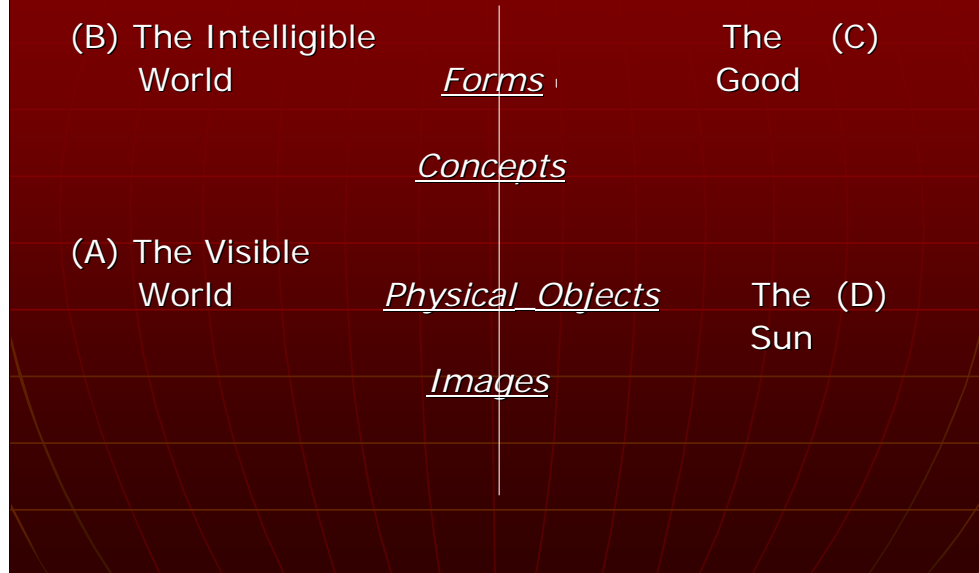
Progress from lowest to highest level is “stage structural”  
(Analogy of the Divided Line)

Relationships between levels are defined in terms of  
resemblance, not causality, but...

Consider the implications of the Allegory of the Cave

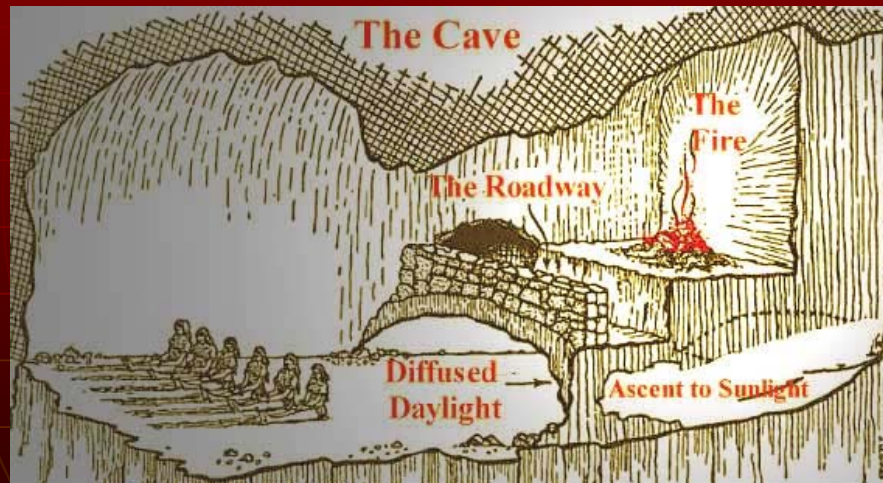


# Analogy of the Divided Line



**Note secondary (internal) resemblances as well as the main ones**

# Plato's Allegory of the Cave



<http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/images/PlatoCave.jpg>

## Possible Implication:

Sun is the “Source” of lower forms. Is this a kind of creative causality? An analogue of artistic creation?

View video clip to get feel for Plato's language and dialogical style

### 3. Plato's Method of Inquiry



Plato's method of inquiry is to ask questions that stimulate the memory.

Aristotle's method of inquiry is to pull abstract ideas from empirical observations.

#### **Raphael's *Court of Athens*:**

**Plato** points up to the heavenly Forms, which are known to us from birth even though we need "gadflies" such as Socrates to help us remember what we know.

His method of inquiry is to ask questions that stimulate the memory.

**Aristotle** holds his hand flat, to show that the objects of human knowledge are things in this world, which can only be known through sense experience.

His method of inquiry is to abstract ideas from empirical observations.

## Socratic Questioning

- The Meno: Slave boy discovers his innate idea of Circle

### **Socratic Questioning**

**The Meno: Slave boy discovers his innate Idea of Circle**

**Socrates' minimalist conception of teacher as gadfly, midwife, questioner**

**Irony: Socrates' trial and death**

## 4. Plato's Tripartite (Three-way) Conception of Self and Society

- The three parts of the Self
  - Reason
  - Spirit
  - Appetite
- The three parts of Society
  - Rulers
  - Guardians
  - Workers

**“Rulers” need not be elected: Plato was no democrat**

**“Guardians” are for external and internal defense (soldiers and police)**

**“Workers” are the producers and consumers of basic goods**

## The Common Virtues of Self and Society

- The three virtues of the Self:
  - Reason (**Wisdom**)
  - Spirit (**Courage**)
  - Appetite (**Temperance**)
- The three virtues of Society
  - Rulers (**Wisdom**)
  - Guardians (**Courage**)
  - Workers (**Temperance**)

### **Problem:**

**If every person has all three parts of the soul, how  
Is a ruler different from a soldier or worker?**

### **Solution(?)**

**Maybe his analogy is to the ROLES (ruling, etc,) not to the PERSONS who fulfill these roles. In other words, the first one is a psychological division, the second a sociological (structural) division.**

## “Justice Writ Large”

### Three-way Division of the Self

1. Head (Reason)
2. Heart (Spirit)
3. Belly (Appetites)



### Three-way Division of Society

1. Ruling Class
2. Guardian Class
3. Working Class

**“Writ large” is Benjamin Jowett’s famous old-fashioned way of saying enlarged or “zoomed.”**

## Justice as Harmony

- Justice is best seen “writ large” in society
- Socratic Conclusion: Social Justice is harmony among the three parts of society, and Personal Justice is harmony among the three parts of the soul

**Contrast this with Thrasymachus’s proto-Marxist idea that justice is “the advantage of the stronger” (i.e., a construction by the ruling class for its own benefit.**



## PLATO'S RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY

- **Plato's Mind-Body Dualism** still challenges cognitive psychologists who appeal to neurology.
- **Plato's View of the Good as the Highest Form** inspires moral developmentalists who regard moral principles as intrinsically motivational.

### PLATOS RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY

Plato's Mind-Body dualism challenges cognitive psychologists who appeal to neurology.

Consider what psycholinguists call "the poverty of the stimulus."

Plato's view of the Good as the highest form inspires moral developmentalists who regard moral principles as intrinsically motivational.

Consider Lawrence Kohlberg's claim "To know the good is to desire it."

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## THE END